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ABSTRACT

Follow-up data are often a neglected part of the evaluation of community programs. Yet, they should be an essential part of the information input to the process of judging effectiveness and whether or not the program should continue. This paper presents follow-up data on a juvenile diversion program which has been operating in a small Western Canadian city over the past three years. Interview data are based on 43 youths and parents and recidivism data are based on a larger diverted group (N=196) and court processed group (N=117). Preliminary results of the interview data are very positive. Both the youths and parents were very favorably disposed to diversion, and all preferred diversion to court (about 1/3 had had court experience). Recidivism data, also were very positive. Almost twice as many court-processed youths (50 percent) as diverted youths (26 percent) recidivated during the one-and-a-half year period following the diversion offense. Results suggest that diversion is the preferred course of action for pre-delinquents. (Author)

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Delinquency Diversion: Follow-up - Interview and Police Data

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Abstract

Follow-up data are often a neglected part of the evaluation of community programs. Yet, they should be an essential part of the information input to the process of judging the effectiveness and whether or not the program should continue. This paper presents follow-up data on a juvenile diversion program which has been operating in a small Western Canadian city over the past three years. Interview data are based on 43 youths and parents and recidivism data are based on a larger diverted group (N = 196) and court processed group (N = 117).

Preliminary results of the interview data are very positive. Both the youths and parents were very favorably disposed to diversion, and all preferred diversion to court (about 1/3 had had court experience). Recidivism data, also were very positive. Almost twice as many court-processed youths (50%) as diverted youths (26%) recidivated during the one-and-a-half year period following the diversion offence.

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, 1983, Anaheim, California.

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Delinquency Diversion: Follow-up - Interview and Police Data

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Follow-up data are difficult to obtain and often a neglected part of the evaluation of community programs. Yet, decisions to continue or not to continue these programs should be based on more than just a summative evaluation. There needs to be follow-up evaluation to adequate assess program effectiveness. The following is a presentation of follow-up data on a juvenile diversion program which has been operating in a small Western Canadian city for the past three years.

Juvenile diversion evolved out of a need to:

1. avoid a negative impact on the youth of the traditional juvenile justice system;
2. relieve the pressure on the juvenile courts; and
3. promote social harmony among the victim, youth and community.

Objectives. The objectives of the present diversion program were to:

1. Offer a community-based alternative to the juvenile justice system;
2. Provide the opportunity for delinquent youths to acknowledge responsibility for their behavior in an informal, non-threatening situation;
3. Encourage justice for both the victim and the youths;
4. Process the cases with a minimum of delay;
5. Allow the youth and their parents/guardians to be directly involved in the resolution/restitution process;
6. Enable the victims and youths to meet one another so that each might better understand the difficulties of the other and gain insight into what might have led to their victimization and delinquent behavior, respectively;
7. Aid victims in seeking restitution and compensation for the personal harm they suffered;
8. Provide information about the juvenile justice system to the community and community resources available to the victims.

Eligibility Criteria. For youths to be eligible for participation in the Diversion Program the following criteria must be met:

1. youths must be between the ages of 8-15 years inclusive;

2. there must be informed consent of the youth and parents, or guardians;

3. youths must not have serious emotional or psychiatric problems;

4. they must not be transient;

5. they must not have committed serious offences such as murder, assault, sexual assault; and

6. a diversion agreement must be reached and carried out.

After satisfying the eligibility criteria, youths are selected for diversion by the Police Youth Division after consideration of a number of factors:

1. the reasons for engaging in delinquent behavior;

2. the general home situation (e.g., what will the parents think, what kind of discipline is likely to be handed out, whether there are problems at home, etc.);

3. social workers and/or teachers comments (e.g., whether there is a discipline problem at school);

4. previous contact with the police;

5. seriousness of the offence.

Diversion Process. The diversion process involves:

1. a decision by the Police Youth Division to divert the youth to the diversion program and when they are about to be charged with an offence;

2. arrangement by a project worker for a diversion meeting (one or more), which last 1-2 hours, and involve the youth, his parents/guardians, two community volunteers, the project worker and the victim (if willing to attend); during these meetings an attempt is made to reach an agreement for restitution to the victim, acceptance of responsibility by the youth, and the means (e.g., part-time job) by which the youth can redress the grievance;

3. monitoring by the project worker to ensure that the youth completes diversion agreement;

4. if the diversion agreement is not completed, renegotiating of the agreement, or referral back to court.

Method

Data were gathered through parental and youth interviews (N = 43) and police records (diverted youths, N = 196; court youths, N = 117). Youth and parental impressions about the diversion process were obtained immediately following the diversion meeting, and again one-and-a-half years later. The number of warnings, diversions and court appearances were calculated for each youth to determine recidivism.

Results and Discussion

Interview Data

Sample characteristics. Sample characteristics of the interviewed group (N = 43) were very similar to those of the court (N = 117) and diverted (N = 196) groups -- upon which recidivism rates were based. The average age of the youths at the time of diversion was 13.9 years, and at the time of follow-up 15.5 years. Eighteen percent were Native, 82% were White; 80% males and 20% females. Thirty-one percent had had previous contact with the juvenile justice system. Of these, almost two-thirds (61%) received nothing in the way of a warning and were not charged, one-quarter (23%) were warned once, eight percent were warned more than once, five percent were warned and charged, and three percent were charged.

The offences for which youths were diverted included break-and-enter (79%), theft under $200 (33%), theft over $200 (26%) and wilful damage (26%).

Youth impressions. Youths felt that they had been treated extremely fairly, had had an opportunity to have some input during the diversion meeting, and that they should definitely accept responsibility for what they did; and there was no significant change in this regard in information gathered immediately following the diversion meeting compared with one-and-a-half years later. Youths also felt they had learned a great deal about why they had transgressed--more so one-and-a-half years later than at the time of the diversion meeting.

Tne percent of the youths had been to court prior to diversion. They were asked to compare court and diversion. Relating these two experiences, diversion was seen as much more comfortable than court, and all of the youths preferred diversion over court. Diversion was seen as much fairer and more was learned about the victim during diversion than court. All of the youths were very satisfied with the diversion process.

Parental impressions. Eighty percent of the parents/guardians attending the diversion meetings were female. Similar to youths' impressions, parents/guardians felt that the victims were treated moderately fairly, while the youth was treated extremely fairly.

Thirty-three percent of the parents/guardians had previously taken part in court hearings. Comparing the two, all of them preferred diversion over court; diversion was seen as much better than court, and a moderately better way of meeting the victim's needs. Parents/guardians felt that they had learned about as much about the victim as they would have had they gone to

court. There was no significant change in responses to the foregoing questions when comparing impressions at the time of the diversion meeting with those at the follow-up interview.

Parents/guardians of those youths who had been in court before felt that "diversion was more fair than court".

Although generally, the parents/guardians were very satisfied with the diversion program, there were some reservations. Sixty percent of them gave diversion an unqualified "yes", with comments like "terrific", "fair", "just". It "... helps the youth realize his responsibility." The boys' attitude was "... helped considerably by meeting with the victim--realizing that they had hurt someone by their actions." Forty percent of the parents/guardians, however, offered comments like "wasn't tough enough", "need more counselling available", "the kids weren't scared enough". Or the punishment was "too lenient". And the costs of transportation of the youths to and from the program activities was a financial hardship.

Court Data

Sample Characteristics. Court processed youths were matched to a sample of diversion youths on the basis of age, sex, race, previous contact with the police, and offence (Table 1). The two groups were of identical age (13.9 years), contained the same proportion of Natives to Whites (19.4% of Natives in the diverted group and 23.1% Natives in the court group), and almost the same proportion of females to males (14.8% females in the diverted group and 18% females in the court group). The two groups contained similar proportions of youths who had been warned once (court, 30.8%; diverted, 23.3%), warned more than once (court, 12.8%; diverted, 8.1%), and were first offenders (court, 56.4%; diverted, 60.5%). In addition, 4% of the diverted group had been charged previously, and another 4% had been both charged and warned previously--possibly making this the higher risk group than the court group of youths.

The types of offences committed by youths in the two groups is also similar. For break-and-enter the proportion of court youths (23.9%) was slightly greater than diverted youths (17.3%); and the same was true for theft over $200.00, court youths (21.4%), diverted youths (15.3%). The proportion of those committing theft under $200.00 was almost identical--court youths (41.9%), diverted youths (41.3%); and this was true for possession of stolen goods--court youths (1.7%), diverted youths (1.5%). A major difference between the two groups was the greater number of diverted youths (15.8%) than charged youths (2.5%) committing wilful damage; and the greater number of diverted youths (6.1%) than charged youths (2.5%) committing fraud. One-half of one percent of the diverted youths and 2.5% of the court youths committed assault, and 2% of the diverted youths and 3.4% of the court youths committed other offences.

Recidivism. The most significant difference between the two groups is the recidivism rate; 26% for the diverted youth and 50% for the charged youth (see Table 1). These results are further bolstered by an overall comparison of recidivism rates for juveniles processed by the Police Youth Division during the period January, 1979 - December, 1981 (see Table 2). The recidivism rate

for diverted youths (25%) is slightly more than half of that of youths going through the usual court procedure (43%). These results are based on a larger sample of both diverted (n = 225) and charged (n = 344) youth.

Conclusions

Together these results suggest that diversion is the preferred course of action for pre-delinquents. The recidivism results are particularly impressive. A word of caution is in order, however, since despite the matching procedure, there are undoubtedly a priori differences between the diverted and court processed youths which may be responsible for the favourable outcome for the diversion youths.

Having said this, however, results strongly suggest that diversion is a desirable alternative to the usual court system. It has the support of the youths, the parents, both at the time of the incident and one-and-a-half years later, and it is supported by the recidivism data (albeit this requires further confirmation). Diversion has a number of advantages over court:

1. it is less costly,
2. it involves the community,
3. it provides an opportunity for the victim and the youth to meet under more favourable circumstances;
4. it provides an opportunity for restitution and compensation to the victim;
5. it avoids the stigmatization of going to court.

It deserves further consideration.

Reference

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Table 1

Demographic, Offence and Recidivism Data for Diverted and Court Youths for the period January, 1979 - December, 1981.

	Diverted N = 196		Court N = 117	
	N	%	N	%
Race				
Native	38	19.4	27	23.1
White & Other	158	80.6	90	76.9
Sex				
Male	167	85.2	96	82.0
Female	29	14.8	21	18.0
Age (Mean)	13.9 yrs		13.9 yrs	
Previous contact with the police[a]				
	N	%	N	%
Warned once	52	23.3	36	30.8
Warned more than once	18	8.1	15	12.8
No warning or charge	135	60.5	66	56.4
Charged	7	3.0	-	-
Warned and charged	11	5.0	-	-
Offences for which youths[b] were diverted or sent to court				
	N	%	N	%
Break and Enter	34	17.3	28	23.9
Theft over $200	30	15.3	25	21.4
Theft under $200	81	41.3	49	41.9
Possession of stolen goods	3	1.5	2	1.7
Willful damage	31	15.8	3	2.5
Fraud	12	6.1	3	2.5
Assault	1	0.5	3	2.5
Other	4	2.0	4	3.4
Recidivism Rate	55	26.0	58	49.6

[a] Previous contact data are based on N = 223.
[b] These are frequencies of offences and thus include cases of multiple offences.

Table 2

Overall Recidivism Rates for Juveniles Processed by the Police Youth Division for the Period Jan/79-Dec/81

	Warned	Diverted	Court
Total N	1834	225	344
Recidivism			
N	269	57	197
%	14.7	25.3	42.7